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ABSTRACT

A review of partial results of a survey of 265 rural schools in the North Central Association's 9 westernmost states revealed interesting trends in the characteristics of rural school personnel. Among the 192 teachers, 43 principals, and 46 school board members responding to the survey, women held fewer leadership positions than men, who held 91% of the principalships and 89% of the school board positions. Because only about 20% of the respondents represented ethnic minorities, the respondents' ethnic ratios did not match those of the broader population of the United States. Responding teachers tended to remain in the same school to a much greater degree than principals, who had generally attained a higher level of education. Nearly 80% of the principals and teachers had no specific preparation for rural teaching and, contrary to other recent research, 41% felt such preparation was not appropriate. Respondents revealed a general satisfaction with the quality of their educational programs although principals were more dissatisfied than teachers with inservice programs and all were somewhat dissatisfied with guidance and counseling services. Elementary teachers had more extracurricular responsibilities than secondary teachers, who often taught more than two disciplines and produced several different class preparations daily. (SB)

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SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS AND PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL SCHOOL TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS AND SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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Recent research as well as literature from the past, presents conflicting and confusing information about rural education In much of the literature on rural education, the strengths and weaknesses of rural schools are discussed and summarized (O'Neal & Becker, 1981-82). Generally, the writers are in agreement on the broad issues and concur that the strengths of rural schools are based on the size which allows teachers, students, administrators, parents and community to be cooperatively involved in the educational process. Weaknesses almost always include the failure of rural schools to provide continuous, high quality education (Noble, 1981; Salmon, 1980).

One account of the strengths and weaknesses of rural schools can be found in an article published in the North Centeral Association Quarterly in 1974. Sturges (1974) suggests that "small schools hold the same concern for quality education as their big city brothers..." (p. 291). While that may be the case, rural schools continue to be plagued by a number of problems over which they have very little control: preservice preparation of teachers; lack of professional services and educational resources; low tax bases; and low socioeconomic white and minority groups (Amodeo, 1981).

Charles (1969), in a study of rural teachers, reported that 97.4% of the teachers felt they were inadequately prepared to teach in rural schools. Some of the concerns centered on their lack of preparation in a greater number of subject fields. Maintaining a quality staff of teachers is a principal problem of rural school administrators according to Moriarty (1981). While there may be a number of applicants, finding teachers who can effectively deal with geographic isolation, population diversity and sparsity, and the rural life style, is difficult. Moriarty (1981) suggests that teachers who lived in rural communities when growing up, or who did their student teaching

in a rural setting, usually have less difficulty in adjusting to rural teaching conditions.

The lack of professional services and educational resources further compounds the problem of quality of rural teachers (Becklun & Gaashold, 1980). Inservice and staff development opportunities are limited by geographic isolation and the unavailability of adequate delivery systems. The absence of support services, educational as well as health, social, career and personal counseling, creates additional problems in rural communities with economically deprived groups.

Charles (1969), Moriarty (1981), Muse and Stonehocker (1979) are researchers who report the perceptions of rural teachers and administrators in their studies. These are important studies since it is essential in research on rural schools to include information from those who are actually involved so that rural values, concerns, frustrations, aspirations and goals are reflected.

This study looks at the perceptions of school board members, principals, and teachers regarding the preparation of their teachers and the availability of professional services as well as educational resources. An analysis of financial conditions and a demographic survey of the sample populations are included in order to present a more complete picture of the rural population surveyed.

In Spring 1982 the researchers applied for and received two grants which were designed to focus research on rural educational concerns. One grant, which is funded by the North Central Association Commission on Schools' Research Committee and the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, New Mexico State University, targets on a comparative analysis of programs and perceptions of various constituencies in accredited rural schools as opposed to those in

non-member rural schools to determine values accrued from North Central Association accreditation.

The nine westernmost states of the North Central Association region were chosen as the target population for this study because of their high percentage of rural schools and what is perceived to be common problems associated with their rural school populations. The states include Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wyoming. Identified schools included all accredited rural schools with matched similar non-accredited rural schools not currently applicants for NCA membership. Factors which are being studied include: teacher assignment; types and extent of inservice programs; preparation of teachers; characteristics of community and school; extent of curriculum offered; and perceptions of school board members, teachers and principals.

The second grant is funded by the Educational Research Center, College of Education, New Mexico State University, and extends the North Central Association grant to focus additionally on factors specific to the State of New Mexico, i.e., multiethnic education; demographic profile of the rural teacher; teacher, administrator and community interrelationships; and cultural and ethnic considerations. All rural schools in New Mexico have been contacted. Broad and general questions are being addressed in both research projects. These in turn, have been broken down into specifics for the purpose of the survey instruments used. These instruments were developed for teachers, principals, and school board members.

In May a pilot study to validate the NCA questionnaires was conducted in Arkansas. This appeared to be an appropriate area for a pilot study since it currently has seven member rural elementary schools and 26 member rural high schools. Since no rural junior high/middle schools currently hold membership,

two schools were selected from the six which were located in towns under 5,000 population. Of the member schools, two rural elementary and two rural high schools were selected. These schools were matched with non-member schools. A total of 11 schools agreed to participate. Questionnaires were sent for all teachers, the principal, and school board members with instructions that the principal should return teacher and principal questionnaires, with board members returning theirs separately in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided. This same procedure has been followed with the Nine-State Study and the extended New Mexico Study. Returns were sufficient to aid in the revision of the questionnaires for the Nine-State Study.

Questionnaires for the Nine-State Study were sent out in September to 140 NCA member schools and to 125 non-member schools. The questionnaires have been returned on a regular basis and are still being received. To date, 192 teachers, 43 principals, and 46 school board members have replied.

A preliminary review of the data suggests some interesting factors to be considered. These data are presented through tables on the following pages. Implications of these data are the topic of this presentation.

As indicated in Table I, 192 teachers have responded of which 104 are elementary and 88 are secondary teachers. Of the 43 principals, 12 are elementary and 31 are secondary. Forty-six school board members have replied. Respondents are evenly distributed between elementary and secondary schools, but 65% of the respondent teachers were female while 91% of the respondent principals were male. If these trends continue through the larger study, it would appear that women predominate the teaching ranks in rural schools. It would also appear that a smaller percentage of rural principals are women than is the case across the nation in all schools. According to the National Advisory Council On Women's Educational Programs, fourteen percent of all

TABLE I

DATA ON RESPONDENTS - PRELIMINARY

	Male	Female	Total	Elem	Secondary	Total
Principals	39	4	43	12	31	43
Teachers	67	125	192	104	88	192
School Board	41	5	46	-	-	-
TOTALS	147	134	281	116	119	235

TABLE II

ETHNICITY AND LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY OF RESPONDENTS

	Language Proficiency			Ethnicity				
	English Only	One Language Other Than English	Two or more Languages In Addition To English	American Indian	Asiatic	Black	Hispanic	Other
Principals	34	8	0	1	1	1	4	33
Teachers	141	23	15	18	2	12	7	140
School Board	32	5	0	1	0	0	2	35

public school principalships were held by women. Only nine percent of the principals in this preliminary study were women.

The preliminary study included returns from only 46 school board members. Of this 46, only five (11%) were women. Again, if this trend continues throughout the study, women hold few leadership positions in rural schools, either as principals or as school board members.

The preliminary returns included schools on Indian reservations. This influenced the pattern of ethnicity among respondents. As indicated in Table II, eight percent of the 257 individuals who reported ethnicity indicated they were American Indian, while five percent were Hispanic, five percent were Black, and one percent were Asiatic. A total of 81% reported "other." Eighteen percent of the principals were ethnic minorities, while 22% of the teachers were ethnic minorities.

Of the 258 individuals responding to the languages in which they were proficient, 80% indicated that they were proficient in English only. Fourteen percent indicated proficiency in one language other than English, while six percent indicated proficiency in two or more languages other than English. Approximately the same percentage of principals and teachers were proficient in English only. No comparisons have been made at this time with the percentage of students in these rural schools who are bilingual or are native speakers of a language other than English. It would appear from this preliminary data that ethnicity of rural teachers does not match the ethnic ratios in the broader population of the United States since the majority of these teachers and principals are of Anglo-Western European ancestry.

Only one-third of the teachers reported having less than five years experience in the rural school in which they were currently teaching, while nearly 51% of the principals who reported indicated they had held that

principalship less than five years. Sixty-seven percent of these teachers, compared with 79% of the principals, had been in the school in which they were currently assigned for more than five years. In viewing Table III, it appears that teachers tend to remain in the same rural school to a much greater extent than do principals. This factor may influence the style of leadership by the principal and may influence the extent of inservice activities which can be carried on by the principal. It has been noted by the authors that many rural principals capitalize on the extensive experience of their teachers in providing inservice activities and even seek advice in regard to administrative matters from teachers with longer tenure in the school. These latter reflections do go beyond the data provided in the preliminary study.

Table IV indicates the highest level of education acnieved by the various respondents. All principals reported holding the master's degree or higher, while only 46% of the teachers held the master's degree or beyond. Seventeen percent of the principals held the Ed.S. or doctorate while only one percent of the teachers held the Ed.S. degree. Rural school principals, at least in this rural school study, have attained a considerably higher level of education than have the teachers in the schools they administer. Little difference was noted in levels of education achieved by either elementary or high school principals or by elementary or high school teachers in these rural schools. Twenty-seven percent of the principals and 34% of the teachers indicated they were working toward higher degrees.

When queried about the ways in which they had received preparation for teaching in a rural setting, it is noted that none of the teachers or principals in this preliminary study reported having taken specific courses designed for rural schools. It is also noted in Table V that only seven (4%) of these respondents believed such separate courses would be the most appropriate

TABLE III

EXPERIENCE OF RESPONDENTS IN RURAL SETTING

	Teaching		Administration	
	In Rural Setting	In This School	In Rural Setting	In This School
Teachers:				
Less than 5 years	–	61		
5 to 14 years	-	83		
15 or more "	-	39		
Principals:				
Less than 5 years	9	16	16	19
5 to 14 years	13	4	11	12
15 or more "	6	5	6	6

TABLE IV

ACADEMIC PREPARATION OF RESPONDENTS

Highest Level of Education Achieved	Teachers				Principals				
	Completed		In Progress		Completed		In Progress		School Board
	Elem	HS	Elem	HS	Elem	HS	Elem	HS	
Less than 12 years									0
High School Diploma									12
Attended College									10
Associate Degree									4
Bachelors Degree	55	46					1		10
Master's Degree	29	28	22	16	5	9			4
Master's Plus 30 Hours	15	11	6	9	5	15	2	1	
Ed.S. Degree	2	1	2	1	1	4	1	4	
Doctoral Degree	0	0	2	4	0	2	0	2	5

approach for preparing teachers for teaching in a rural setting. Only nine percent of the teachers and no principals had received preparation through specific content related to rural schools in regular courses, while 18% of the teachers and 13% of the principals believed this would be the most appropriate approach for preparing teachers in rural schools. Twenty-three percent of the teachers believed inservice workshops were the most appropriate approach. Nearly eighty percent of both teachers and principals reported having no specific preparation for teaching in rural schools. Forty-one percent of both groups believed no specific preparation was appropriate. This latter finding appears to be inconsistent with the results of other earlier studies in which rural teachers and principals have indicated a great need for specific preparation for teaching in rural schools. It will be interesting to see if this trend continues in the larger study underway.

The data shown in Table VI indicates the number of teachers, principals and school board members who indicated either satisfaction of dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the educational program in their schools. No great dissatisfaction with any of these aspects was shown by any of the three groups. Over ninety percent of both teachers and principals expressed satisfaction with classroom activities, teacher evaluation of student progress/achievement, opportunities to innovate, and administrative support toward innovative practices. Principals were also highly satisfied (97%) with the textbooks used, while 84% of the teachers also expressed satisfaction with textbooks used. School board members responded to only two equivalent aspects of the program. Seventy-four percent of school board members responding, as compared with 90% of the teachers and principals, were satisfied with teacher evaluation of student progress.

On the basis of the results of this preliminary study, it would appear that teachers and principals in rural schools tend to be satisfied with the

TABLE V

PREPARATION FOR TEACHING IN RURAL SETTING

	Ways Rec'd Preparation For Teaching in Rural Setting		Most Appropriate Approach for Preparing Teachers	
	Teachers	Principals	Teachers	Principals
Specific Courses Designed For Rural Schools	0	0	5	2
Specific Content Related to Rural Schools in Regular Courses	15	0	26	4
Program Designed For Teaching In Rural Setting	4	0	17	9
Inservice Workshops	6	3	34	3
Attending Conferences	8	4	5	1
No Specific Preparation	125	31	60	13
TOTALS	158	38	147	32

TABLE VI

DEGREE OF SATISFACTION WITH CERTAIN ASPECTS OF SCHOOL PROGRAM

Aspect of Program	Teachers		Principals		School Board	
	Satis.	Dissat	Satis.	Dissat.	Satis.	Dissat.
Textbooks Used	145	28	34	1		
Classroom Activities	185	5	41	1		
Teacher Evaluation of Student Progress/Achievement	168	19	37	4	34	12
Teacher Availability to Students Outside Regular Classroom	158	25	31	11		
Opportunities to Innovate	184	9	38	4		
Administrative Support Toward Innovative Practices	166	14	41	0		
Financial Support of Innovative Practices	139	39	28	11		
Availability of Inservice Programs for Teachers	139	48	23	19		
Opportunities For Teachers to Attend Inservice Programs	147	38	28	14		
Scope and Sequence/Articulation of Curriculum	155	24	28	14	38	7

quality of what they are doing with the curriculum and with textbooks being used. Principals indicated less satisfaction than did teachers with financial support for innovative practices, with the availability of inservice programs for teachers, with opportunities for teachers to attend inservice programs, and with the scope and sequence/articulation of curriculum. It may be that teachers tend to have greater satisfaction with these aspects of the school program than do principals because of their greater tenure in the school. Could it be that principals who have been in the school for a shorter period of time and who have achieved a higher level of education than the teachers realize greater inadequacies in current practices? It is important to note that the teachers and possibly principals in this preliminary study may hold the educational program in their schools in higher regard than is warranted. This point is raised due to concern in many quarters regarding the appropriateness of many textbooks for rural children, the reported lack of effective inservice progrmas for rural teachers, and inadequate financing found in many rural school districts.

Data presented in Table VII indicates the degree of satisfaction teachers, principals and school board members had with various components of the program. More than 90% of each of the three groups of respondents indicated satisfaction with only two of the 18 components listed on the questionnaire. These three components were: competence of teachers in working with rural children and youth; community support of athletics; and teacher certification for teaching in rural schools. More than 90% of both teacher and principal respondents indicated satisfaction with: the general school curriculum; teacher understanding of rural children and youth; school library/media center; transportation services; and teacher assignments. In no instance were fewer than 73% of the teachers satisfied with any component. The only instance in which fewer than 73% of the principals were satisfied with a component was in the case of inservice programs.

TABLE VII

DEGREE OF SATISFACTION WITH COMPONENTS OF PROGRAM

	Teachers		Principals		School Board	
	Sat.	Dissat.	Sat.	Dissat.	Sat.	Dissat.
Community Support of Curr. Offerings	150	36	36	5	41	4
Community Support of School Athletics	166	16	37	3	43	3
Guidance/Counseling Services	140	40	30	10	26	18
School Library/Media Center	167	21	39	2	40	6
Transportation Services	166	21	40	1	44	2
Preparation of Teachers	173	14	36	5	37	8
Teacher Assignments	174	15	38	2	39	7
School Facilities	167	23	36	7	35	11
Inservice Programs	134	50	27	13	43	3
Evaluation of Student Performance	164	24	37	3	34	12
Diagnosis of Student Abilities	159	30	34	6	30	15
Use of Comprehensive Student Reporting System to Parents	156	32	33	7	29	14
School Program Evaluation	170	16	34	6	30	15
Involvement of Students in Program Evaluation	137	40	31	9	30	15
Competence of Teachers in Working With Rural Children and Youth	179	7	37	3	41	4
Teacher Certification/rural schools	175	8	36	4	39	5
The General School Curriculum	180	9	36	4	38	7
Teacher Understanding of Rural Children and Youth	174	10	35	4	36	8

TABLE VIII

EXTRACURRICULAR RESPONSIBILITIES ASSIGNED

	Teachers	
	Elem.	Sec.
Club Sponsor	5	9
Coaching Interscholastic Athletics	3	10
Coaching Intramural Athletics	5	0
Drama Activities	0	4
Student Council or Class Sponsor	3	15
Music Activities	2	4
Newspaper, Yearbook, etc.	1	6
Chaperone For Social Functions	2	1
Ticket Selling, Superv. School Events and Fund Raising	12	24
Other	11	12
Two or More	80	35
Three or More	16	29

Even in that instance two-thirds indicated satisfaction.

School board members tended to indicate less satisfaction with the various components than did teachers and principals. In four instances, only two-thirds of the school board member respondents indicated satisfaction with components. These were: diagnosis of student abilities; use of comprehensive student reporting system to parents; school program evaluation; and involvement of students in program evaluation. Only fifty-nine percent of the school board respondents reported satisfaction with guidance and counseling services. It is appropriate to note that teachers and principals also reported a lower degree of satisfaction with guidance and counseling services and with involvement of students in program evaluation than they reported in regard to most other components.

Table VIII indicates the number of teachers at both elementary and secondary levels who are assigned various extra curricular responsbilities. On the basis of these preliminary results, it appears that elementary teachers tend to be assigned a greater number of extracurricular responsibilities than are secondary teachers. Eighty-three percent of the elementary teachers reported responsibilities for two or more extracurricular activities while only 53% of the secondary teachers reported being assigned two or more. A greater number of secondary teachers reported responsibilities for coaching interscholastic athletics, serving as student council or class sponsor, and ticket selling, supervising school events and fund raising. Although these authors do not have corresponding data for non-rural schools, it would appear that a greater percentage of teachers in rural schools must assume extracurricular responsibilities than is the case in other schools.

The data presented in Table IX indicates the number of preparations and separate disciplines currently included in teacher assignments at the secondary

TABLE IX

NUMBER OF PREPARATIONS AND SEPARATE DISCIPLINES CURRENTLY INCLUDED IN TEACHER ASSIGNMENTS (SECONDARY)

	Different Content Courses Taught During Year	Number of Preparations Assigned	Number of Separate Disciplines Taught
One	8	11	58
Two	10	13	14
Three	23	20	5
Four	39	20	6
Five	8	14	3
Six	0	5	0
Seven	0	3	0

		Sec.
Teaching Courses Outside Endorsement Areas:	Yes	9
	No	77

level. Forty-four percent of these teachers reported teaching four different content courses, while another 26% reported teaching three different content courses. The number of different preparations assigned varied from one to seven. Three percent of these teachers reported having seven different preparations, while 26% reported having five or more different preparations. Seventy-two percent reported having three or more preparations. Only thirteen percent reported having a single preparation. Sixteen percent of these teachers reported teaching three or more separate disciplines while two-thirds indicated that they were teaching a single discipline. Only ten percent of these secondary teachers indicated that they were teaching outside areas in which they were endorsed to teach.

In drawing conclusions based on this preliminary data, it is important to stress that the data is based on fewer than 10% of the respondents anticipated in the total study. Whether or not these individuals and schools from which they come are typical is a fundamental question. With this caution in mind, the following tentative conclusions are stated:

1. For the most part, it appears that teachers, principals and school board members are generally satisfied with the quality of the program being provided rural children and youth.

2. There appears to be less support for special preparation of teachers for rural schools than was found in previous studies. Whether or not this is typical of what will be found in the larger study is not known at the present time.

3. Principals appear to be less satisfied with inservice opportunities for rural teachers than is reported by teachers. Since rural principals tend to have a higher level of educational achievement than do teachers, it maybe that they have more accurate insights in regard to needs of teachers than do teachers.

4. Teachers tend to be predominantly female while principals tend to be predominantly male in rural schools. This appears to be true to a greater extent than is true nationally in all schools. It may be that female teachers in rural schools have fewer opportunities than do male teachers to pursue advanced degress and administrative certification.

5. Rural teachers appear to come from the dominant American culture with fewer coming from minority ethnic groups than is found in other public schools throughout the country.

6. Teachers and principals in this preliminary study indicated that no specific preparation in rural education was needed. This is contrary to findings from earlier studies and will be considered carefully as an aspect of the larger study.

7. In the secondary schools, teachers are frequently required to teach more than two or more disciplines and have several different preparations per day. This factor is seldom considered in teacher preparation programs, but should be an essential element if teachers in rural schools are to be at least minimally qualified to handle teaching assignments.

8. In addition to teaching assignments mentioned in #7 above, teachers in both elementary and secondary rural schools are expected to carry heavy extracurricular responsibilities. Few teacher preparation programs give consideration to this aspect of roles required of teachers. Pre-service programs should include knowledge about organization, supervision and purposes of extracurricular activities if teachers are to be expected to assume responsibilities in this area.

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